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MAJOR LEAGUE UMP VISITS HOSPITALIZED VETS IN LOUISVILLE

Retired Major League Baseball Umpire Larry Barnett used to get into a lot of arguments to make a living, but injured and ill veterans at the **Robley Rex VAMC** VA Medical Center in Louisville, Kentucky are looking forward to the banter during his visit on Wednesday, December 3, 2014 as part of the DAV VA Voluntary Service program.

Mr. Barnett has been visiting injured and ill veterans hospitalized at VA medical centers since 1977, bringing cheer and encouragement to the men and women who sacrificed so much for the cause of liberty.

"I feel warm inside when I leave a hospital," said Mr. Barnett. "If I've made three veterans happy, I feel I've accomplished something important."

His story began when Mr. Barnett visited veterans at a VA medical center and stopped to chat with a blinded veteran patient for a few moments. As he began to leave, the patient began to cry and asked him to stay just a while longer. "It was one of the most moving experiences of my life," he said.

Mr. Barnett says the veterans at VA medical centers don't get many visitors and he tries to entertain them with light and humorous baseball stories. "There are a lot of funny incidents that happen on and off the field in the course of a season, and I really enjoy sharing them with these veterans," he said.

During Mr. Barnett's visits, he lets his audience, anywhere from 25 to 200 patients, take charge of the conversation. He said patients often want to discuss more serious topics such as strikes or how umpires weather the wrath of stormy managers, players, or fans. "I'm open to just about anything they want to talk about," he said. "I'll give them my opinion and hear theirs as well."

Mr. Barnett enjoys the personal contact with individual veterans. "I might only have enough time to shake their hands and exchange a few quips before I have to move on to the next bed," he said. "But you can see in their eyes how happy they are just to have someone visit them."

Mr. Barnett makes about 50 visits to VA medical centers each year, both during and after the baseball season. Since he retired from the big leagues in July 1999, he enjoys spending more time with injured and ill veterans. He often appears at two hospitals in one day.

"These guys gave up their limbs or their health for this country," he said. "That's become important to me, especially since I've been able to meet and talk with them on a first-hand basis."